

**Rhode Island Department of Human Services  
Office of Rehabilitation Services  
and the  
State Rehabilitation Council**

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

2014

*Lincoln D. Chafee*  
Governor

*Sandra M. Powell*  
Director

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## Message from the Director

It is my pleasure to provide you with the Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2014 for the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS). ORS is charged with empowering Rhode Islanders with disabilities who voluntarily wish to obtain and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence and full integration into society. Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI); and Disability Determination Services (DDS) provide a myriad of resources and services which enhance the quality of life for Rhode Islanders with disabilities.



Younger individuals with disabilities and their families work with vocational rehabilitation counselors in order to make that important transition from school to post-secondary education and careers. The business and labor community depend on ORS for trained, job-ready applicants.

Rhode Islanders applying for social security disability benefits get accurate and timely decisions, and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired provides services for individuals who have a visual impairment. ORS provides a comprehensive array of personalized services to Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

In FFY2014, 4,841 persons with disabilities were provided vocational rehabilitation, training, and employment services. The Disability Determination Services adjudicated 18,297 claims for social security disability benefits.

We are proud of the partnerships that our staff has developed with our citizen advisory councils, our customers and the community, which has contributed so much to the quality of life for individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island.

*Sandra Powell*

## Message from the Associate Director

On behalf of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, I am pleased to present to you the 2014 Annual Report. The mission of the Office of Rehabilitation Services is to provide customized and comprehensive services to individuals with disabilities that will maximize their quality of life, self-reliance, and economic independence in the community.



We have included success stories that reflect the diversity of our customers and their needs. We want to illustrate the partnership between our staff and our customer that makes rehabilitation work.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program increases revenue at all levels of government and decreases the burden of income maintenance programs. As persons with disabilities achieve an employment outcome, they become tax-paying citizens and more than pay back the cost of the program.

In 2014, ORS assisted 608 individuals with disabilities to obtain competitive employment. With an emphasis on serving individuals with the most significant disabilities, ORS is making a real difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. The accomplishments outlined in this annual report reflect favorably on the efforts of the staff who, by hard work and commitment, have continued a long tradition of serving Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

We are also indebted to the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council, Statewide Independent Living Council, Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind & Visually Impaired, State Committee of Blind Vendors, and Rhode Island Council on Assistive Technology, for their partnership and help in maximizing the potential of persons with disabilities. I also extend my appreciation to our hard-working and capable staff along with our many public and private partners.

*Ronald Racine*

## Message from the State Rehabilitation Council Chair

On behalf of the members of the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council, I am proud to share the 2014 Annual Report.

The goal of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) continues to be focused on working closely with the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) to ensure Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment. The partnership between ORS and the State Rehabilitation Council continues to evolve and grow. The Council and ORS personnel have faced the difficult economic challenges this past year with positive results, assisting 608 Rhode Islanders with disabilities in securing employment.

The work of the Council continues to be organized around the priorities established in the State Plan through the Council's committee structure. ORS leadership is represented on each committee, enabling Council membership to better understand the demands on the Agency and provide support for the structures that allow ORS to be as effective as possible. When required, the Council has advocated through the political process for resources to enable the Agency to fulfill its mission and serve Rhode Islanders seeking employment and independence.

On a personal note, I took over as acting Chair of the Council, mid-year due to an illness to my predecessor. I would like to recognize the Council's Administrative Assistant Nancy Baker for her organizational and emotional support during the past year, both of which have been critical in this transition period. The Council is currently undergoing a strategic review and planning process in the hopes of streamlining our committee structure, developing a clearer succession plan and training process, and thereby clarifying measurable goals and outcomes that will allow the Council to better partner with ORS to meet the needs of Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

Rhode Island has a rich and proud history of advocacy for its citizens with disabilities and as we continue to face a challenging fiscal environment, the Rhode Island Rehabilitation Council will continue to work with the Office of Rehabilitation Services in meeting the needs of Rhode Islanders with disabilities. The Council stands ready to advocate for the rehabilitation program that provides effective, results-oriented services for Rhode Islanders. Please join us for a Council meeting. They are open to the public and information is available on the following website - [www.ors.ri.gov](http://www.ors.ri.gov).

*Jeffrey D. Machado, Acting Chairperson*

## State Rehabilitation Committee Members



Back Row: Nancy Baker, Rocco Bruno, Paul Hardin, Ron Racine, Linda Deschenes, Christine Botts, Catherine Sansonetti, Lori Norris

Third Row: Dan Pieroni, Dominic Diorio, Kelley Conti, Kat Grygiel, Lea Colardo, Laurie Diorio

Second Row: Cindy Cote, Liz Graves, Mona Dorsinville-Phanor , Diana Marcotte, Joan Fino, Christina Battista

Front Row: Acting Chair - Jeff Machado, Secretary - Gail Lawson, Jack Ringland

Missing from Photo: Margaret Benz, Judith Drew, Dorothy Furlong, Maryellen Hagerty, Roger A Iannetta, Diane Kriner, Nicole McCarty, Jessica Mowry, Vincent Rossi, Jane Slade, Willa Truelove, Marilyn Walaska, Kim Wennermark, and Roberta Greene Whittemore

## State Rehabilitation Council Committees

### BY-LAWS

**Authorization:** The Ad Hoc By-Law Review Committee was authorized by the SRC at the February 2014 meeting. Gail Lawson, PhD was appointed to chair this committee.

**Membership:** The SRC membership was asked to self-nominate to work on this committee. The following individuals volunteered to serve on this committee: Kelley Conti, Jeffrey Machado and Kim Wennermark. Nancy Baker provided administrative support to the Ad Hoc committee.

**Meeting Schedule and Format:** The Ad Hoc Committee met four times by conference call. The meeting dates were February 26<sup>th</sup>, March 12<sup>th</sup>, March 26<sup>th</sup> and April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

**Ad Hoc Committee Work and Outcomes:** The Ad Hoc Committee reviewed the existing SRC By-Laws and prepared a report recommending changes to the existing By-Laws. These recommendations were presented to the SRC for review and discussion at its May full council meeting. Issues with the clarity of the proposed changes were identified at this meeting. The recommendations were revised to resolve the identified issues. The proposed changes to the SRC By-Laws were formally transmitted to the full council at the October 14<sup>th</sup> meeting. The SRC will vote on these recommendations at its November 18 meeting.

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Gail M. Lawson, PhD, Chairperson Ad Hoc By-Law Review Committee*

### NOMINATING & LEADERSHIP

This Committee is responsible for leadership development and the recruitment of people who are committed to our mission to work with the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) to assure that all disabled Rhode Islanders are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment. Continuing the mission of the State Rehabilitation Council, the Nominating and Leadership Development Committee sustained its efforts toward ongoing and active recruitment of qualified individuals to its membership. The Committee routinely endeavors to solicit members who will enrich the partnership with the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), represent the interests of the Stakeholders, grow the skill set of the Council through information

sharing and educational presentations, as well as diversify the composition of the group so as to reflect the needs of the populations served, while also meeting the Federal requirements.

- This year we are in the process of reorganizing the membership - there are several new candidates as well as returning members that will be presented to the Governor for appointment.
- Strategies into the 2015 year: The Nominating and Leadership Development Committee is in the process of revamping its purpose. We are consolidating our goals to reflect overall changes in the Council structure. This committee will be renamed, and concentrate efforts on the training of new members. Recruitment will fall on the entire body of the Council especially Leadership. We are utilizing resources from the NCSRC and the RSA, a refined and logistical training program for our membership. Our goal was to have this done by end of 2014 but now it is more likely that this will be an ongoing effort.

Strategies for Training:

- Establish protocols for an annual training event to be done in partnership with ORS.
- Outline and present to Executive Leadership for their review training materials.
- Establish Facilitator protocol for transitioning new members onto the Council's Committees and disseminating training materials.
- Establish a mentoring program for new members.

Committee Members include the following individuals: Christina Battista, Rocco Bruno, Cynthia M. Cote, Dominic DiOrio, Laurie DiOrio (SBVI Liaison), Dr. Mona Dorsinville-Phanor, Elizabeth Graves (SILC Liaison), Paul Harden, Jack Ringland, and Marilyn Walaska.

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Dominic DiOrio, Chairperson Nominations and Leadership Development*

## OUTREACH

The objectives of the Outreach Committee for the year were to increase awareness and communicate the mission of the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) to a broader constituency, starting in particular, with two of the most underserved groups:

- Non-English speaking population
- Multicultural population

In the coming year, the Committee needs to work more closely with and align priorities with the Office of Rehabilitation Services staff to develop a marketing plan and a methodology on how to best communicate to these targeted populations. To that end, the committee will pull a focus group together of individuals within these targeted populations to brainstorm the best venues to reach the maximum number of potential consumers.

Lastly, the Committee in conjunction with ORS would like to put together a budget in the coming year so that once we have identified the best venues to reach these underserved population groups, that we have the resources to best communicate that message, whether it be by print media, bus signage, etc.

Members of the Outreach Committee; Bryant Berganza, Dr. Mona Dorsinville-Phanor, Dorothy Furlong, Vincent Rossi, Willa Truelove, Mr. Kim Wennermark, Roberta Greene-Whittemore (ORS Liason).

***Respectfully Submitted,***

***Jeffrey D. Machado, Co-chair Outreach***

## STATE PLAN, POLICY & QUALITY ASSURANCE

The State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is charged with advising the agency about its plans and policies in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act. The Committee also participates in reviewing the quality of service delivery to ORS customers and continuous quality improvement.

In 2014, the SRC provided its annual feedback and public testimony regarding the ORS proposed FFY2014 State Plan. We continued to encourage ORS to take a leadership role in supported employment so that people with developmental disabilities would be able to move toward competitive and integrated employment. The SRC looked forward to learning about ORS'

measurable goals to determine whether customers were really receiving quality employment outcomes based on hours worked per week, earnings, and benefits. We supported ORS efforts to build and improve liaison relationships between ORS counselors and Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) and to increase the number of CRPs.

The Committee also reviewed findings from the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and met with ORS to discuss themes and comments from providers and ORS personnel. We reviewed the findings and noted especially that there were needs in the area of additional vendors for job development, increased need for outreach to transition aged youth, and that the ORS counselors felt they needed more time to provide counseling and guidance services to ORS customers.

This year, ORS proposed changes to eight (8) policies. Some of the changes were substantive and some were just small updates. We also took the opportunity to comment on the substantive issues that we saw within the policies.

***Respectfully Submitted,***

***Catherine Sansonetti, Co-chairperson State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance***

## TRANSITION

This Council has been actively involved in partnership with the Rhode Island Office of Rehabilitation Services to ensure that all people of Rhode Island with disabilities are assisted, informed and empowered, receive exceptional services and the services lead to employment.

The Transition Committee is charged with advising and assisting the Office of Rehabilitation Services in: increasing the knowledge and awareness of transition-related events; resources; development of targeted outcome to particular youth; and identifying potential barriers and challenges that youth in transition may encounter. This will support ORS and improve opportunities for youths to be successful in transition to employment.

The objectives of the Transition Committee were to:

- 1) Increase the presence of ORS at state, regional and local transition-related events.
- 2) Advise and assist ORS in developing outreach strategies targeted for transition age youth (18-24) that qualify for 504 Plans.

- 3) Assist ORS in identifying barriers and challenges for transition aged youth in order to strategize effective interventions.

The Transition Committee has completed its work and met the goals that were established in March 2013. The Committee would like to continue to work on strategies that address youth that seem to lack information on transition services; address the importance to school counselors about ORS services, the impact of disability on employment, and assist ORS in identifying barriers and challenges that school aged students are faced with.

Committee members include: Christine Botts, Jane Slade (Co-chair), Dr. Judith Drew, Joan Fino, Maryellen T. Hagerty, Paul Harden, Roger Andrew Iannetta, Diana Kriner, Doreen McConaghy, JoAnn Nannig (ORS Liaison ), Daniel C. Pieroni, and Lea Colardo(Co-Chair).

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Lea Colardo, Co-Chairperson Transition*



SRC Members working at retreat

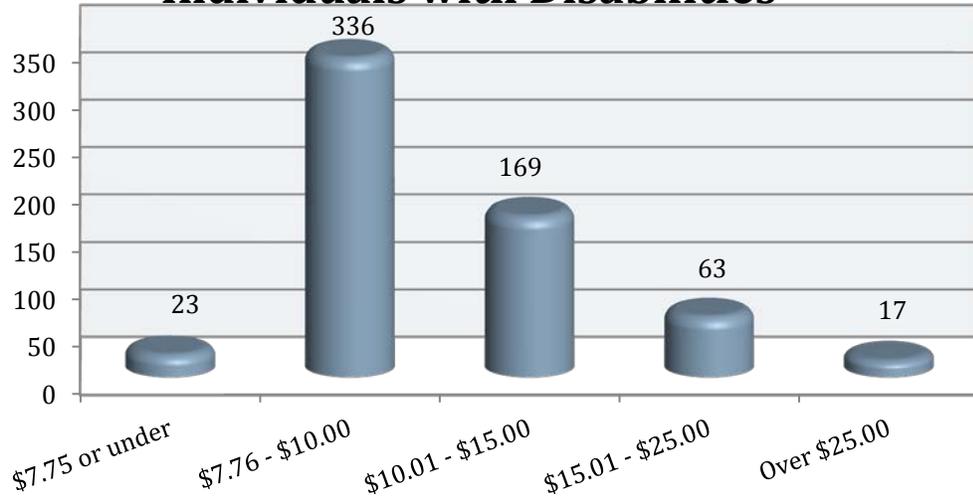
## Program Highlights – Federal Fiscal Year 2014 October 1, 2013 – September 30, 2014

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

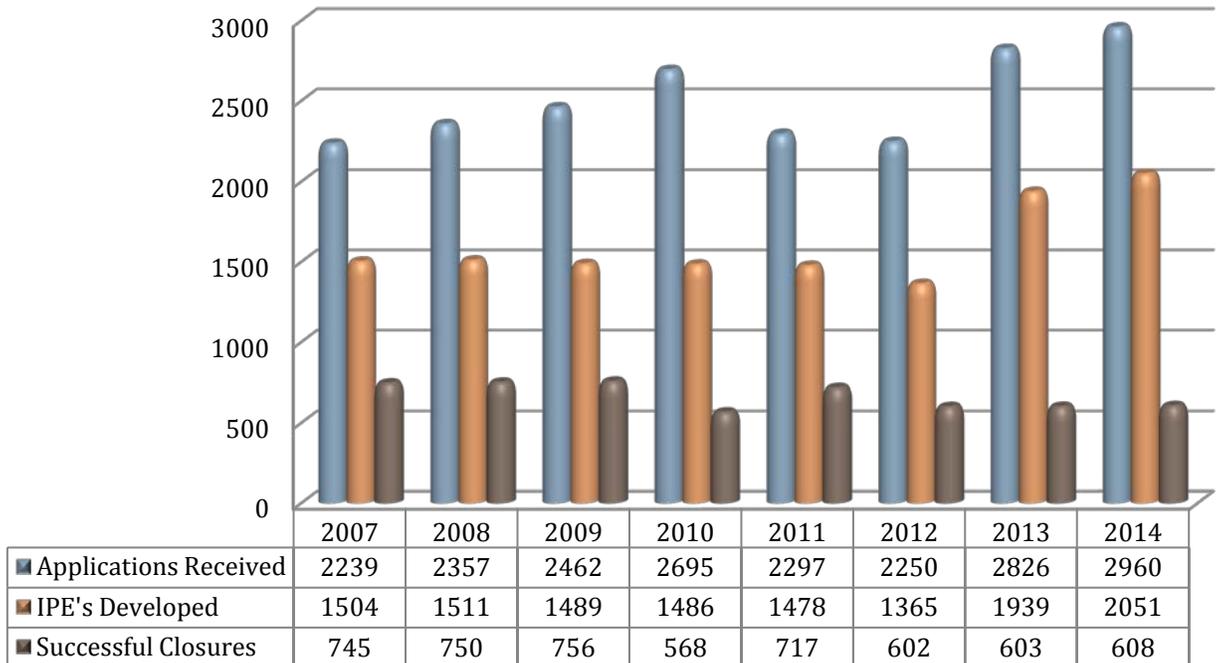
#### **608 individuals were successfully employed**

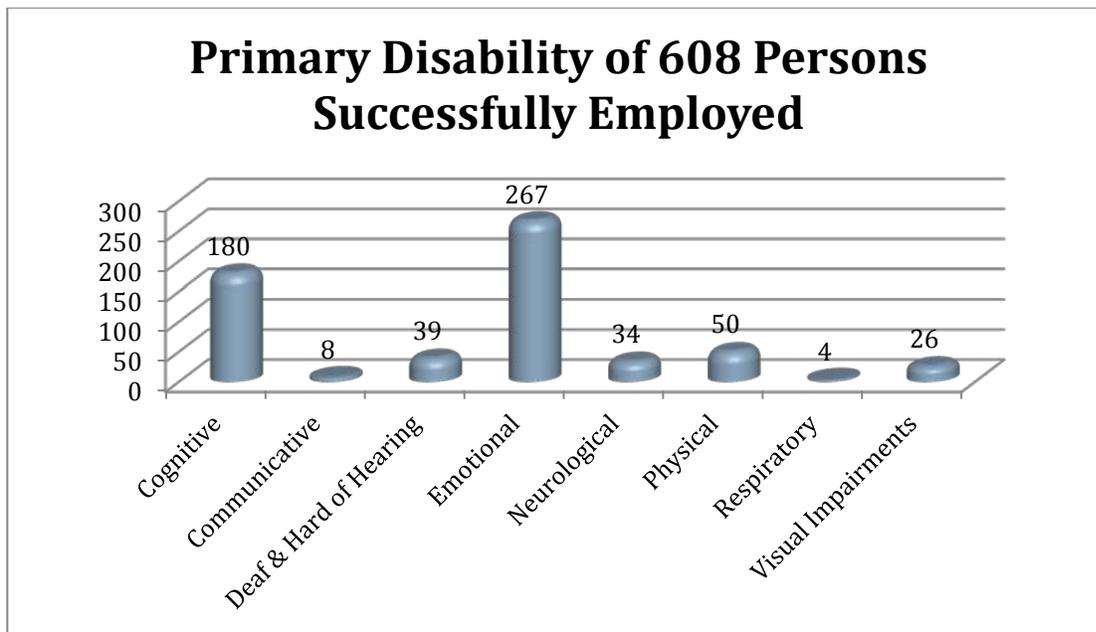
- 2,960** individuals applied for vocational rehabilitation services.
- 4,841** individuals with disabilities were provided vocational rehabilitation services.
- 2,051** individuals worked with a vocational rehabilitation counselor to develop a new Individualized Plan for Employment [IPE].
- 5,759** individuals received services purchased from vendors. Services ranged from evaluations, medical and psychological therapies, personal assistant services, job placement and training.
- 242** individuals received rehabilitation technology services to assist them to prepare for and to enter employment.
- 1,391** individuals received information from Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) Resource Centers about assistive technology (AT) and funding options.
- 998** individuals received AT training, demonstration, loans or assistance with recycled AT devices.
- 357** individuals were provided specialized equipment through the ATEL (Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan) Program.
- 2,713** youth with disabilities ages 14-24 received transition services provided by 20 VR counselors

## Hourly Wage of 608 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities



## 2007 - 2014 Statistical Comparisons





## Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (SBVI)

**16** vending facilities were supported by the Business Enterprises Program (BEP) at Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. While one facility was closed in the prior year, a new facility was opened in May, 2014. Two facilities were renovated/updated this past year. The program accepted 2 new vendor trainees who are in the process of being the first trainees to complete the new Online BEP Training offered by the Hadley School for the Blind in conjunction with the National Association of Blind Merchants. Upon completion, trainees earn the “Entrepreneur of Excellence” Certificate from the Hadley School. This training is free and available to all RI BEP trainees and vendors and compliments the in-house process well. BEP sales totaled approximately \$1.3 million in FFY 14.

**475** individuals were registered for NEWSLINE, a newspaper reading service of which **12** recently signed up.

**401** elderly individuals who are blind or visually impaired received services from the Independent Living for Older Blind Program. Services included: **364** low vision aids, **362** rehab teaching appointments, **127** mobility services, and **42** service coordinations.

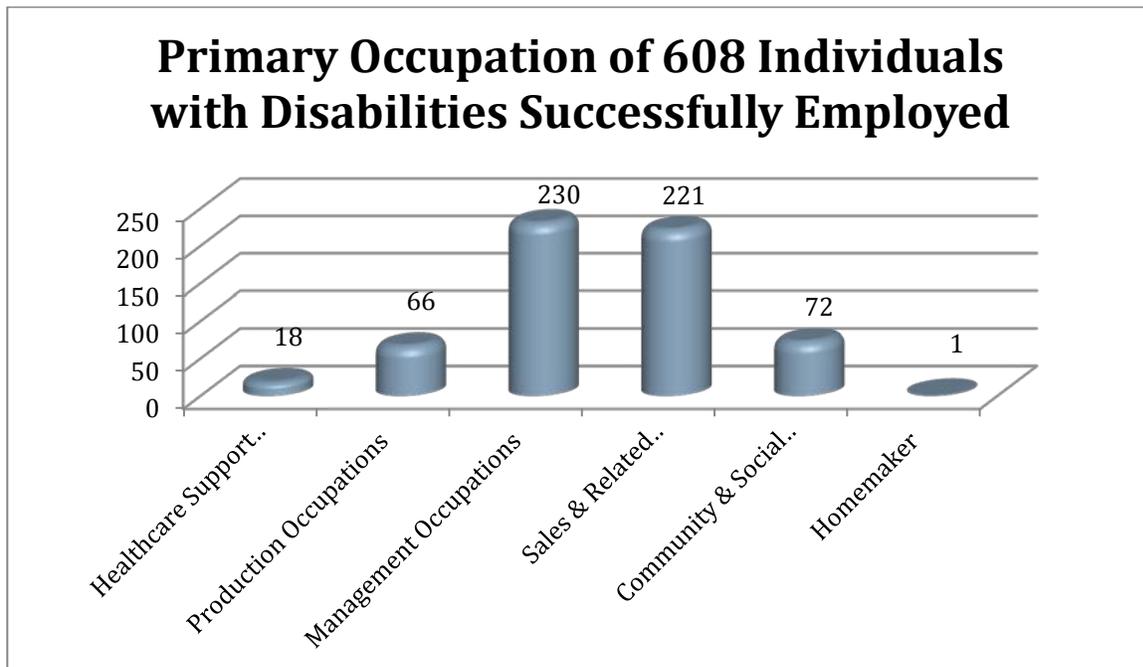
**94%** of this group reported that they feel more confident in their independent living after receiving services, and **14%** indicated they had considered nursing home placement prior to services, but were able to remain in their own homes.

## Disability Determination Services (DDS)

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>17,954</b>      | total cases were received by the Disability Determination Services (DDS).                    |
| <b>18,297</b>      | claims were successfully processed by the DDS.   |
| <b>10,164</b>      | initial claims were filed.   |
| <b>2,297</b>       | Continuing Disabilities Review cases were completed.   |
| <b>316</b>         | Pre-Hearing Cases were processed, resulting in <b>226</b> Disability Hearing Unit decisions. |
| <b>6,400</b>       | cases with Consultative Examinations were purchased.   |
| <b>14,929</b>      | cases with Medical Evidence of Record were purchased.  |
| <b>\$1,809,229</b> | Total Medical Costs with a Total Budget of <b>\$8,421,620</b> .                              |
| <b>\$494.34</b>    | cost per case.   |

Production Per Work Year (PPWY) efficiency rate was **403.9**. The national rate was **310.7**. The performance accuracy rate for RI was **94.2%**. The net accuracy was **97.5%**. The regulatory standard is **90.4%**.

*\*Based on the Monthly Obligation Report for 9/2014.*



## Vocational Rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program is the public state and federally funded-program that assists individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. Employment in an integrated, competitive setting at or above minimum wage being the successful outcome of services provided through the public Vocational Rehabilitation program. It is expected that individuals with disabilities who apply for services are interested in becoming employed and understand that this is the focus of the VR program.

A Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor works with the individual to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that includes an employment goal. The time expected for the individual to reach the goal, the services that the individual chooses as necessary to reach the employment goal, and how the services will be provided are all individualized.

Vocational Rehabilitation services that may be incorporated in an Employment Plan include:

- Assistive Technology Services
- College or Vocational Training
- Counseling and Guidance
- Diagnostic Evaluations
- Housing Modifications
- Job Development and Placement Services
- Job Training and Job Supports
- Other Goods and Services
- Post-Employment Services
- Rehabilitation Technology Services
- Transition Services from School to Career
- Vehicle Modifications

### **Deaf Services...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) helps individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing obtain the services necessary to reach an employment goal, provides counseling and guidance to help plan vocational goals and services, and assists the individual to obtain employment. They serve as a resource to professionals, state agencies, community organizations,

and the public providing information related to employment, training, and accommodations for individuals with a hearing loss.

## **Independent Living Services...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services purchases assessments and independent living services from the Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL) as part of preparing individuals with significant disabilities for employment.

## **Supported Employment...**

The ORS Supported Employment Services Program assists individuals with the most significant disabilities to acquire the skills and experience, along with the appropriate supports, to obtain and maintain competitive employment. Over the past year, as a result of the Department of Justice investigation and settlement, ORS has participated, along with Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) & Department of Education (RIDE), in organizing a service delivery system that is intended to ensure adults and youth with significant intellectual disabilities have access to the opportunity to experience employment in real jobs at or above minimum wage.

The State of RI agreed to embrace Employment First philosophy that emphasizes that all individuals with a disability, including individuals with significant intellectual disabilities, have the right to an opportunity to experience real employment with commensurate wages as the outcome of services provided. Therefore, in practice and philosophy, services to individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities must be based on the premise that all are capable of working in integrated real jobs and participating in integrated community activities, given the right supports.

ORS assisted 21 adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities of which 7 obtained integrated competitive employment. In addition, 4 youth with intellectual disabilities obtained employment in FFY2014. ORS is continuing this successful collaboration with other state partners to ensure seamless service delivery from high school through adulthood.

## **Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan (ATEL) Program...**

The ATEL Program loans telephone equipment to residents of the State of Rhode Island who have hearing, speech, or neuro-muscular (unable to dial or hold a receiver) impairments and have a signed certificate of disability. Equipment is issued on a first-come, first-serve basis.

## **Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services is the lead agency for the Rhode Island Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP). ATAP is a statewide program funded under the Assistive

Technology Act of 1998, which works to reduce or eliminate barriers that impede access to, and funding for, assistive technology devices and services for individuals with disabilities of all ages.

## **Home Modification Program...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services administers federal and state independent living funds which provide home accessibility and adaptive equipment for individuals who are significantly disabled, to enable them to meet independent living goals in their homes and communities.

## **State PCA Program...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services had previously contracted with PARI Independent Living Center to be the fiscal agent for the State Personal Care Assistance program for individuals who were not eligible for Medicaid-funded waivers. Through this program individuals were able to continue living in the community rather than in a nursing home.

## **Transition...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services has a strong commitment to assisting students with disabilities in transition planning to adult life. ORS Rehabilitation Counselors assist all school districts, students with disabilities, and their families to plan services to help students reach career goals. ORS counselors provide technical assistance and information to school systems and work in partnership with school transition staff, 5 Regional Educational Collaboratives, and 4 Transition Academies to improve transition planning.

The Office of Rehabilitation Services is expanding these services to transition-age youth through the development of several pilot projects. This year ORS initiated Rhode Island's participation in the National **Project Search** Program in a partnership with Miriam Hospital, the Providence School Department, and other state and community agencies. Eight students with intellectual disabilities have their classroom situated at Miriam Hospital with a teacher from the Providence School System. The students start and end the day in the classroom with most of the day spent at individual worksite internships throughout the hospital. These worksite internships include sterilization, transport, clerical, housekeeping and more. Project Search will help the interns with career exploration and learning employability skills. The goal of Project Search is for the students, who are in their last year of high school, to move smoothly into integrated, competitive employment.

This is the fourth year of collaboration between ORS, **Central Falls** Special Ed, and Goodwill Industries. ORS identified 15 students to participate in an after-school program that includes job preparation classes for three months. Starting in January, the students will be placed

in paid internships in community businesses earning minimum wage. ORS is concentrating on seniors this year to ensure a smooth transition from the internships to employment.

This is the second year of expanding collation with the Warwick school - **Pilgrim High School**. Pilgrim requested assistance with some of their Special Education students who want to work and were at risk of dropping out. ORS approached West Bay Collaborative, a vendor of ORS, to offer job preparation classes and community-based, integrated paid internships. Students attend ten weekly workshops learning their interests, aptitudes, and skills for employment. In January students are placed in businesses around the Warwick area based on individualized interests and awarded certificates at the end of the year at the vocational school ceremonies. ORS had a fantastic first year with eight of the twelve student participants obtaining community employment, either through their internship sites or utilizing the skills learned in the program to procure a job.

A different program was developed in Northwestern RI based on the needs of this rural school district. Their Special Education Director expressed difficulty with transporting students out of the **Foster/Glocester/Scituate** area for vocational services. ORS has included Northern RI Collaborative, an ORS vendor, to provide vocational assessments on site at the school. The district already has *Project Jobs* for in-school youth, but had no one to follow up for summer work or to sustain employment after graduation. Northern RI Collaborative is now working with students doing vocational evaluations while in school, and providing any adult services necessary upon graduation. ORS also funded summer employment this year in the students' own community.

## **YouthWORKS411**

ORS and DLT YouthWORKS are collaborating on a pilot project for transition aged youth. The goal of this pilot is to connect ORS involved in-school youth or at-risk youth to the community-based employment services from the DLT. The intent of this collaboration is to provide an array of coordinated, consecutive employment services to ORS eligible customers with disabilities to help them achieve employment success and develop the necessary independent life skills to navigate the community-based employment opportunities. YouthWORKS provides an opportunity for students in need of transition supports to gain access to resources for post secondary goals. This may be through training exploration, work experiences and in-depth research towards their senior project.

## Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (SBVI)

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) offers a wide array of services to eligible individuals who are blind or visually impaired through its Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, Business Enterprises Program, and Social Services Program. The various services offered by these programs are designed to help individuals of all ages achieve independence at home, in the community, and in the workplace.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Program...**

A Federal/State Program created to assist people who are blind or visually impaired to obtain or maintain employment. Services provided include evaluation, orientation, mobility training, rehabilitation technology, guidance and counseling, career assessment, educational planning, vocational training, provision of adaptive equipment, job development, placement, and follow-up services.

### **Business Enterprises Program...**

A Federal/State Program which establishes vending facilities in state, federal or private buildings for operation by persons who are legally blind. Licensed blind vendors operate vending facilities at 16 locations throughout the state and are assigned to these locations on the basis of their seniority within the program. Types of facilities range from small snack bars serving light snacks and beverages to larger food-service sites serving hot and cold entrees prepared on-site. All operate under the name of "Coffee Plus".

### **Social Services Program...**

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired coordinates a federal comprehensive service program which focuses primarily on children from birth through age 14, elderly individuals, and individuals for whom a vocational goal is not feasible.

- **Children's Case Management Services** include family casework, coordination with Early Intervention Programs, educational guidance, summer camp for youth, arrangement of ophthalmological and low vision evaluations, and information and referral to appropriate community programs.
- **Independent Living for Older Blind Program** provides case management services, along with ancillary services for mobility and orientation, rehabilitation teaching for skills training in activities of daily living, management of low vision, provisions of adaptive equipment, and information and referral to support groups and appropriate community services.

## Disability Determination Services (DDS)

Disability Determination Services (DDS) is the unit within the Office of Rehabilitation Services that determines the medical eligibility of Rhode Island residents (both children and adults) who have applied for benefits under the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) programs. Although fully funded by the Federal Social Security Administration (SSA), the DDS is a state agency with the responsibility of obtaining the medical records and other pertinent information needed to determine whether the applicant meets the criteria for disability as defined by SSA rules and regulations.

Over the past decade, the Rhode Island DDS (RIDDS), along with the other DDS' nationwide, has transformed itself away from a paper-based institution by installing a fully electronic record-keeping system. The DDS now has the capacity to process over 99% of its current workload in a fully electronic format. Using national scanning contractors, in-house casual processing, and a system of inbound and outbound faxing, the images of all medical records are now captured and stored in an electronic case folder. This allows multiple individuals, at multiple locations, to be working with a case record simultaneously, and also allows for the exchange of case information with specialty experts throughout the Social Security disability network.

The RIDDS continues to play an important role nationally in determining the design of the adjudicative model for the Social Security Disability Program. This is accomplished thru testing, evaluating, and incorporating the innovations which make the system more user-friendly and navigable for the disability applicant. In the coming months, the RIDDS will be becoming more involved with the development of a new Disability Case Processing System that is currently being piloted in Idaho, Illinois, and Missouri. This legacy data tool will standardize the information technology and system maintenance of all the DDS's nationwide, and eventually tie in with other operatives within the Social Security Administration disability adjudication program.

In FY2014, the RIDDS ranked at the top nationally on SSA's productivity measure, which is adjusted based on staff size, It was also able to achieve all of its targets for accuracy, while processing over 18,500 disability applications for residents of Rhode Island. The number of individuals seeking disability determinations stabilized in FY2014 after having increased dramatically over the past few years. The combination of the Baby Boomer generation aging into its most disability prone years, and the sustained local and national economic downturn contributed greatly to the heightened number of disability applications. The RIDDS, with a diminished staff, at times, has struggled to keep pace with its workload with the by-product being

a progressively longer wait for disabled Rhode Islanders to receive decisions on their disability applications. The RIDDS has made progress in this area in FY2014, as the case processing time decreased by more than 10% and is no longer the lengthiest in the country. Despite some impediments, the dedicated and responsive staff at the RIDDS throughout FY2014 continued to maximize all of their available resources to provide quality service to the citizens of Rhode Island.

## **Local Social Security Field Offices**

380 Westminster Mall, Room 318  
Providence, RI 02903  
1-877-402-0808

30 Quaker Lane, 1st Floor  
Warwick, RI 02886-0111  
1-866-964-2038

4 Pleasant Street  
Pawtucket, RI 02860  
1-866-931-7079

Pavilion Plaza  
2168 Diamond Hill Road  
Woonsocket, RI 02895  
1-877-229-3542

130 Bellevue Avenue  
Newport, RI 02840  
1-866-253-5607

2 Shaws Cove, Room 203  
New London, CT 06320  
1-866-643-3401

## Recognizing Success

*“As reported, ORS assisted **608** individuals with disabilities to obtain employment in jobs that were consistent with their goals and aspirations. ORS would like to showcase some individuals who exemplify the benefits of employment.”*

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**CLIENT:** ORQUIDEO DEPINA  
**OCCUPATION:** AUTO MECHANIC  
**EMPLOYER:** PROGRESS MOTORS  
**COUNSELOR:** DORIAN HAVERS

Orquideo, or “Q” as he likes to be called, is a 29-year old male who is supported by Training Thru Partnerships (TTP)/FedCap. He attended Birch Vocational for Special Education until he graduated in 1994. He then worked solely at TTP which was identified by the Department of Justice as a sheltered workshop. He has had little opportunity to experience integrated competitive employment.

ORS provided Supported Employment services to Q, which included a vocational evaluation, job development, job placement, training, benefits counseling and uniforms/shoes for his work, and retention supports. He obtained a job at Progress Motors in November, 2013. Q works 35 hours per week at his job. At Progress Motors, he engages in various auto mechanic duties -- changing oils/fluids, rotating tires, etc.

Q has also been profiled by the Providence Journal for his perseverance to move from a sheltered workshop to full-time integrated employment. He is proud of his success, and now wants to learn more about his business, and possibly obtain his driver’s license.

# 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

**CLIENT:** MICHAEL FALCO  
**OCCUPATION:** DISHWASHER/PREP COOK  
**EMPLOYER:** POCASSET BAY MANOR  
**COUNSELOR:** KRISTEN LIVESEY

Michael is a 21-year old man working as a dishwasher/ prep cook at Pocasset Bay Manor in Johnston RI. His journey toward successful employment began while he was in his senior year at Cranston High School East. Michael received Special Education Services through Cranston Public Schools. He was referred to ORS by his IEP team.

Michael met with a Rehabilitation Counselor and applied for services in 2012. Although Michael was initially unsure of a specific vocational goal, he benefitted from various exploratory evaluations to help narrow down his career goal. Around the same time as these evaluations were happening, Michael and his IEP team decided that he would attend a transition year at the Cranston Transition Program. Through this transition year Michael was able to gain valuable life and vocational skills. Upon graduation, Michael participated in a job preparation program through West Bay Collaborative. This opportunity provided Michael with a 10-day community work experience, where he was placed at Pocasset Bay Manor in the maintenance department. He realized that this was not a job that he would like to do long term. However, Michael displayed such positive work skills during these 10 days that the kitchen staff asked if he would be interested in trying a job as a dishwasher. They stated that he was just what they were looking for.

Michael completed a 10-day situational assessment to make sure this was a good placement for him. Michael loved this job, and the staff loved him. They offered him a job as a dishwasher/ prep cook, and Michael accepted. ORS was able to provide Job Development, Job Placement, Job Retention, bus pass letter, uniforms, and benefits counseling to help ensure job retention. Michael has increased his hours and is very happy about his quality employment outcome.



**CLIENT:** DAVID REBOCHO  
**OCCUPATION:** REHABILITATION TEACHER  
**EMPLOYER:** STATE OF RI  
**COUNSELOR:** PAUL HUGHETT

In 2009 David was pursuing a career as an Emergency Medical Technician. He had obtained the necessary training and certifications, and was applying those skills when he had to undergo eye surgery. David began to realize that with the increased eye strain and fatigue, his vision was worsening; and he determined he may have to reconsider his choice of employment. He began working with ORS Counselor Paul Hughett on exploring his transferrable skills and various employment options.

In their work together, David and his SBVI/VR Counselor identified the Human Services field as an area of interest for his employment goal. David had enjoyed his time volunteering as the medical staff person both onsite at Camp Mauchatea working with children with visual impairments, and also at the Youth Leadership Forum working with transition-age students with disabilities. However, during this time period David's vision further deteriorated and he became legally blind.

SBVI/VR was able to work with David as he moved toward his new vocational goal in the human services field and provided him with the following services: vocational guidance and counseling, low vision evaluations and low vision aids for daily living and employment, non-degree training, job development, job placement, and job retention.

David was able to apply for the position of Rehabilitation Teacher at the Office of Rehabilitation Services/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. He felt that he was an ideal candidate for this position based on his skills. David was hired in 2011 to work with the Independent Living Unit, and he continues to support individuals with visual impairments as a Rehabilitation Teacher. He has been able to pursue his passion for exploring, utilizing, and training individuals on assistive technology and various aids to daily living.

*"The last almost four years have been fantastic; I truly enjoyed saving lives and helping people before in the EMS field but now I receive so much more joy from helping others who have vision problems and hope that my knowledge and strength is enough to help guide them on a better path/journey". -David Rebocho*

# 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



**CLIENT:** FRANKLIN OKUNOLA  
**OCCUPATION:** SCANNER/DATA ENTRY OPERATOR  
**EMPLOYER:** O'NEILL CONSULTING GROUP  
**COUNSELOR** TERESA SCARAMUZZO

Franklin is a 22-year old young man and a 2013 graduate of The Birch Academy in Providence. He has barriers to employment secondary to a learning disability and ID. He began working with the Office of Rehabilitation Services upon graduating high school in June of 2013. During his high school years, Franklin's academic studies did not offer him the ability to participate in vocational experiences in the community. Upon meeting with his counselor, Franklin was very shy and quiet and did not offer conversation, answering only when asked questions directly, and even this was an effort for him.

Franklin was referred to FedCap who performed a vocational evaluation to explore employment interests. Franklin expressed an interest in computers and was placed in a supported employment situational assessment at Pawtucket City Hall, where he performed light clerical duties including data entry and scanning. Through one-on-one job coaching, Franklin quickly became proficient at these job duties. As his confidence soared, ORS provided Franklin with a RIPTA bus pass. He was soon traveling independently utilizing RIPTA to and from work. He proved to be a valuable, reliable, and dependable employee. ORS was able to hire Taylor Made Training to work with Franklin one-on-one to increase his Microsoft Word skills and typing ability. Franklin did very well, often only needing to be told once, and retaining information from week to week.

In February of 2014 Franklin was offered a position with O'Neill Consulting Group in Wakefield RI. He is working there as a scanner/data entry person, working 8 hours a week making prevailing wage. Franklin benefitted from supported employment services, which ORS authorized through FedCap. He was provided job coaching and supports while he acclimated to his new position. Franklin has become a valuable member of the O'Neill team, and they have been very supportive and welcoming to Franklin. As Franklin is by nature very quiet and shy, his supervisor has encouraged him to ask questions on a daily basis. In following that direction, Franklin came into work and asked his supervisor if he had heard of Earth day, and how they planned to celebrate. O'Neill Consulting responded to Franklin's questions by celebrating Earth Day with staff and Franklin by planting a tree. They have also showed their appreciation of Franklin's presence by celebrating his birthday at work. Franklin is independent in his commute to work and continues using RIPTA. Every day the once shy and quiet employee enters and leaves the office with a jubilant **Good Morning** and **Goodbye**.

# 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



**CLIENT:** FIONA HALSTEAD  
**OCCUPATION:** CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANT  
**EMPLOYER:** SOUTH COUNTY NURSING & REHABILITATION CENTER  
**COUNSELOR:** KATHLEEN NEUN

Fiona was first referred to ORS by Exeter/West Greenwich High School in 2003. She needed assistance with career exploration, identifying her vocational aptitudes, and determining the supports she would need to be successful. While in high school Fiona utilized an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to support her learning differences, life skills, and communication. With the guidance and counseling that she received from her ORS counselor, Fiona decided that she wanted to explore a career in nursing. Before graduating from high school, Fiona received a vocational assessment, a driving assessment, and participated in the Youth Leadership Forum.

Following graduation, Fiona enrolled in the CNA program at the Community College of RI to begin her vocational journey. After the completion of a few courses, ORS referred Fiona to a rehabilitation engineer for an assistive technology evaluation. As a result of the evaluation, Fiona was equipped with a digital recorder that would best support her post-secondary learning. Due to her learning differences, Fiona decided that it would be best to improve her literacy skills before working toward a specific vocational goal.

In 2011 Fiona reconnected with her ORS counselor for additional guidance & counseling to help her reach her career goal of being a CNA. Since her time at CCRI, she had volunteered at the Exeter Animal Shelter, but knew she still wanted to obtain her nursing assistant certificate. Her counselor explored pre-CNA programs, and suggested Fiona look into Job Corp.

Fiona was accepted into Job Corp in 2012, where she received the academic support needed to begin the CNA program. When it was time to go out on clinical, Fiona contacted ORS due to her difficulty hearing patients' vitals without an amplified stethoscope. Her ORS counselor referred Fiona for an audiology assessment to determine the extent of her hearing impairment. With Fiona's comparable benefits and ORS support, she obtained hearing aids that lead to her successful completion of Job Corp in November, 2013, passing her CNA exam, and obtaining employment. Additional vocational support ORS provided to Fiona to help her maintain her employment was a clothing voucher and driver's training.

Fiona accepted a CNA position at South County Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in November of 2013. She currently works 30 hours a week and receives the employer's benefits package. In addition, Fiona obtained her Driver's License!

# 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



**CLIENT:** SANDRA MAZZARELLI  
**OCCUPATION:** DONOR SPECIALIST  
**EMPLOYER:** RI BLOOD CENTER  
**COUNSELOR:** PAULA BERARD

Vocational rehabilitation is a process requiring the commitment and diligence of both a client and the VR counselor in a working partnership. Sandra re-opened her case file in 2012 after working in a short-term job. Sandra desired a professional career in the medical field, but significant hearing loss provided barriers to communication. This client and her VR Counselor from the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) decided upon training as a Phlebotomist and EKG Technician. Sandra's long-term goal was to work at the RI Blood Center. Although requiring some direct communication, Sandra would not have to use the telephone as an essential function of her job. She could perform the job tasks with training and on-site accommodations, and it met her value of becoming a professional employee. The first step was to research and decide upon a training program, attain appropriate vaccinations, and solidify classroom accommodations.

Sandra attended the 911 Program and obtained her certification as both a Phlebotomist and EKG Technician. Her VR counselor was able to assist with necessary blood work and vaccinations, as well as scrubs. Their next steps included matching this client with a job developer from Tailor-Made-Training, one who is familiar with the medical field and who provided one-on-one assistance with developing a resume, while working on interview skills, and researching employment opportunities. Throughout the whole VR process, Sandra's hearing worsened, necessitating new hearing aids and frequent adjustments, for which ORS funds were utilized.

In March, 2014, Sandra realized her dream of working for the RI Blood Center as a Donor Specialist! Her job requires her to travel to a variety of fixed sites and mobile units to draw blood for donations, which she enjoys; however, once Sandra started working on the mobile units, it was found that the work environment was challenging because of the noise from the HVAC in the van. Since an essential function of her job is to interview potential blood donors and document a fairly extensive case history; ORS, in an effort to maintain this employment situation, worked with Dr. James Healey, AUD. He recommended a ComPilot and remote microphone which wirelessly streams patients' voices directly into Sandra's hearing aids. This blue tooth technology also works with telephones, thereby lessening another barrier in the work place.

Currently, Sandra is working an average of twenty-seven hours per week, with the expectation for her hours to increase. She receives health and vacation benefits, and anticipates pursuing additional education through the RI Blood Center. Sandra has already been invited to become a preceptor once she attains Level II Donor Specialist, which would allow her to train newly-hired employees. Sandra states that she could never have any of this without the services of ORS or her VR counselor. She is very excited about her future and she loves her job!

# 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



Mark Heffner, Jr. and Production Manager, Ron Diggett

**CLIENT:** MARK HEFFNER JR.  
**OCCUPATION:** PRODUCTION WORKER  
**EMPLOYER:** TEKNICOTE  
**COUNSELOR:** KATHLEEN MCCABE

Mark Heffner, Jr. was referred to the Office of Rehabilitation Services when he was a sixteen year-old student at Barrington High School, where he had an Individualized Education Plan.

Mark was initially somewhat reluctant to become involved with ORS services, but with the support of his parents and teachers, he agreed to participate in vocational evaluations through the East Bay Educational Collaborative and Looking Upwards.

Over time, Mark became more comfortable with the concept of “work”, and his social and organizational strengths became apparent. Mark participated in a Summer Work job, and he eventually attended the Rhode Island Transition Academy at Roger Williams University, where his social and vocational skills were honed.

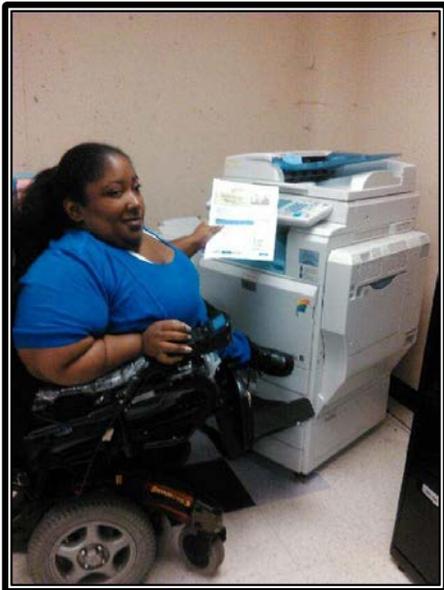
This agency then referred Mark to the Groden/Cove Center Job Club in Providence, where his social skills were again addressed, and where he experienced further vocational growth.

As Mark was completing the Job Club, a family friend referred him to a position at Teknicote, a precision coating services facility, which was then located in Cumberland. Mark was hired for twenty hours per week, and he has since become an integral part of their employment team.

Ron Diggett, the Production Manager, has utilized Mark’s organizational expertise, and he is now in charge of organizing the paint room in their new Rumford facility. Mark has also organized the supplies that the workers use so that they are able to work more efficiently and are better able to know what to order when supplies run low. Ron said that the rooms have never been better organized, and that he “couldn’t ask for a better worker”.

It is obvious that this is an excellent job match and that Mark was well prepared for this position. Mark says he is grateful to Kathy McCabe, Ron, President Steve Dolan, and his Teknicote co-workers who have helped him transition to a job he loves. It has been a “win-win” situation for both Mark and for Teknicote, who hired a dependable, capable and work-ready employee.

# 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



**CLIENT:** SOFIA DIAZ  
**OCCUPATION:** ASSISTANT SPECIAL EDUCATION CLERK  
**EMPLOYER:** CENTRAL FALLS HIGH SCHOOL  
**COUNSELOR/  
SUPERVISOR:** KAROL GAITAN/ BARBARA MULLIGAN

Sofia applied for services while a student at Central Falls High School due to her mobility and learning difficulties caused by Spina Bifida. Sofia utilizes a motorized wheelchair for mobility. She participated in ORS's pilot project, called CF-TRI, a collaboration funded by ORS to coordinate services for students between Goodwill Industries, ORS, and the Central Falls School Department.

In this program Sofia worked on her interviewing and work skills, and also participated in a 100-hour internship as a clerical worker with the Central Falls School District. In addition, Sofia completed a four-week summer work experience at Progreso Latino.

During her last year of high school, Sofia attended the Northern Rhode Island Transition Academy, where she continued to increase her community employment skills. She also became skilled in Travel Training enabling her to access the community independently.

This May funding became available in the budget at Central Falls High School, and Sofia was hired as a part-time Assistant Special Education Clerk. ORS funded BioNexus to conduct a worksite technology assessment to explore any accommodations that would assist Sofia in completing her job tasks. ORS provided a voice recorder and voice recognition software to assist Sofia on the job.

## **Low Tech Success - SBVI**

This customer is an eighty-eight year old widow living alone in her own home. She is visually impaired due to macular degeneration, is hearing impaired, and has cardiac problems. She has two children, but only one resides in Rhode Island. They have been encouraging her to move to senior housing. She is not ready to leave her house because she feels safe and believes she can continue to be independent. She still takes care of the household tasks and manages her own finances. She had difficulty setting the oven, reading, telling time, dialing the telephone, hearing, and doing crafts. Socialization and singing in the senior center chorus were also hindered by her hearing impairment.

After having low vision and audiology evaluations, new glasses and two up-dated hearing aids were provided to her resulting in great improvement in these areas. Proper lighting enabled her to read, write and do crafts more easily. A loud talking clock allowed her to tell time even when not wearing her aids. A big button telephone made it easier to place calls. Marking the stove dial allowed her to set the oven with confidence. All of these low tech devices allowed her to safely remain in her home with maximum independence.

At the completion of services, this customer sent the caseworker a hand crafted card. Part of the message said, "Thank you so very much, I really appreciate what you did for me. I love everything and don't know how I ever got along without them."

## **High Tech Success - SBVI**

This customer is a seventy-one year old divorced woman. She is legally blind due to field loss from retinitis pigmentosa. She presently rents a room in the home of a friend. She has been an artist all of her life, and continues to pursue this passion, but is disturbed because she can no longer identify colors due to her visual condition. She sadly recalled an instance about her six-year old granddaughter laughing because she had painted purple trees.

She was also having difficulty with food preparation, setting appliance dials, reading, utilizing her iPad, and orientation and mobility. A low vision evaluation was arranged to provide her with appropriate glasses and aids. Rehabilitation teaching services were accessed to address cooking, food preparation, and other activities of daily living.

She expressed a desire to use more adaptive technology and was provided with and taught to use a hand held scanner. This device reads bar codes and verbally identifies them, allowing her to identify her paints and other items. In addition, the device has stick on and iron on washable clothing labels. She can use her own voice to record the labels. Lastly, although an iPad user, customer was not aware of the accessibility features on her iPad including the ability to access Talking Books. Funding was provided for her to receive training on this device.

This client is also an avid traveler. Orientation and Mobility services were provided to assure the client the skills and confidence to move about independently and safely in her home and wherever she travels. All of these services and adaptive equipment are making it possible for her to continue activities she is passionate about, as well as enabling her to continue to be as independent as possible.

## Partnerships

**The State Rehabilitation Council** is a citizen advisory body appointed by the Governor. The Council is consumer-controlled in that a majority of its members are individuals with disabilities and not employed by the State VR Agency. Members represent agencies, organizations and other councils of and for individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island. The SRC in conjunction with the VR agency jointly conduct the comprehensive statewide needs assessment of individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island, develop and agree to the state's annual goals and priorities in carrying out the VR program, annually evaluate the state's performance relative to its goals, and conducts customer satisfaction surveys. Together the SRC and the state VR agency partner to assure that individuals with disabilities receive appropriate, timely, and effective VR services.

**The Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired** is an advisory council appointed by the Governor that advises the SBVI regarding the programs provided by that agency; works collaboratively with the State Rehabilitation Council and the Statewide Independent Living Council; and provides oversight responsibility to the Independent Living Program for the Elderly Blind.

**The RI Council on Assistive Technology (RICAT)** is the advisory body to the RI Assistive Technology program - Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) which is funded through the AT Act. RICAT is actively involved in legislative and other initiatives to increase access to assistive technology for Rhode Islanders.

**The RI Statewide Independent Living Council (RISILC)** jointly develops and submits, in conjunction with the ORS, the State Plan for Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living. They also monitor, review, and evaluate the implementation of the State Plan.

**The State Committee of Blind Vendors** is composed of representatives elected from among all licensed blind vendors within the state. The Committee participates actively in carrying out all of the program management responsibilities.

## Standard 1 Employment Outcomes

| Indicator   | FY<br>2009   | FY<br>2010  | FY<br>2011     | FY<br>2012  | FY<br>2013   | FY<br>2014   |
|---|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Indicator 1.1 - Number of Employment Outcomes - Federal Standard Equal to or greater than prior year  | 6<br>greater | 188<br>less | 159<br>greater | 116<br>less | 1<br>greater | 5<br>greater |
| Indicator 1.2 - The percentage of individuals who exited the VR Program after receiving services who achieved an employment outcome. (Federal Standard - 55.8%) | 62.79%       | 40.72%      | 60.18%         | 28.80%      | 58.90%       | 59.60%       |
| Indicator 1.3 - The percentage of individuals who achieved an employment outcome and are earning at least the minimum wage. (Federal Standard - 72.6%)          | 96.30%       | 97.89%      | 97.52%         | 99.20%      | 99.80%       | 99.3%        |
| Indicator 1.4 -Competitively Employed (minimum wage or higher) who have a Significant Disability<br>Federal Standard - 62.40%                                   | 100%         | 100%        | 98.31%         | 98.80%      | 100%         | 100%         |
| Indicator 1.5 -Earnings Ratio of Minimum Wage or higher for ORS vs. State Average<br>Federal Standard - Ratio of .52  | .510         | .540        | .500           | .500        | .500         | .500         |
| Indicator 1.6 - Self-Support (report own income at closure vs. own income at application)<br>Federal Standard 53% mathematical difference                       | 54.40%       | 62.95%      | 67.28%         | 70.10%      | 64.10%       | 64.40%       |
|   |              |             |                |             |              |              |
| <b>Standard 2 Minority Ratio Equal Access to Services</b><br>Federal Standard Ratio of .80 for n=100+   | .847         | .890        | .910           | .730        | .840         | .799         |

DHS does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, age, religion or sex in acceptance for or provision of services, employment or treatment in its educational and other programs and activities.

For further information about this policy, contact: the Community Relations Liaison Office, 401.462.2130 or TDD (hearing impaired) 401.462.6239.



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